



**Studies in Performing Arts & Media**

## **Mission Statement**

With the emergence and subsequent institutionalization of Performance Studies in the US in the 1960s, two paradigms developed alongside the vigorous debates that existed between continental European Theatre Studies and American Performance Studies. Performance Studies claimed to challenge the institutional norms of higher education with its research-through-practice, and reproached Theatre Studies for not doing so. Performance Studies is said to be transnational, while Theatre Studies is said to conduct rather national research. Theatre Studies is said to study the drama text within the theatrical production process, while Performance Studies is said to study performativity through broader cultural analysis. At the 2009 Performance Studies International Conference, the organizing committee included the specific challenge of bringing together the different approaches of studying theatre and performance in the opening panel entitled “Friendly Fire”. It soon became clear that a strict division between the two fields and paradigms is no longer possible. Continental poststructuralist philosophers have strongly influenced the political questions tackled in performance studies and, as Hans-Thies Lehmann’s Postdramatic Theatre has made clear, theatre studies also includes the study of the performance text. Theatre Studies and Performance Studies have moved towards one another, but it still remains undeniable that they both emerged from different traditions. S:PAM makes a point of including Theatre Studies and Performance Studies as dialoguing entities in the disciplinary, methodological and political / ethical questions it poses. Bringing these two traditions of thought into dialogue enables us to actively overcome divisions between theatre as “high culture” within European contexts and performance traditions from different continents. Thus, S:PAM is geared towards “International Performance Literacies” as suggested by Janelle Reinelt (2007). An origin of “European Theatre” in and through the antique tragedy has, for example, been a dominant of early Theatre Studies, through which it nurtured an exclusive concept of European “high” culture. This concept has been contested and ultimately changed through performance studies and the proliferation of studies on so-called postdramatic theatre. Many theatre, dance and film festivals are productive performative spaces that not only present collections of artistic performances and visual representations; they are also spaces that contest the concept of the “West” as stable entity. The relation of “self” and “other” in performance, subjectivity, as well as racial and gender identity are important issues at S:PAM. Many performances are not mainly narratives about an absent “Other”, but instead open up a space of encounter with the “Other”. Thus, audiences– in many contemporary theatre and performance contexts – are becoming participants and witnesses in/of the performative event. Possible ways of relating to an “Other” are performed within the performance process. The ethical dimensions of Performance Studies also touch upon further social

and political issues. Due to the recent and ongoing economic crises, the contemporary theatre world is also currently undergoing fundamental changes. Thus, theatre economies and the precarious working situation of theatre makers and other cultural workers are also topics of interest at S:PAM. It might well be said that the actor/actress—the theatre person—stands for the avant-garde precarious working and living situation, which in the near future will also be the standard for the so-called former middle class. It is crucial at S:PAM to reflect on and investigate this fact, as well as to remain aware of and to question current migratory movements: All these – and other – realities bring forth huge and ever-changing bodies of performances, films and other representations in new media.

Theatre Studies has a rich tradition of historical research. S:PAM brings these methodological issues into dialogue with the concept of performativity. Research at S:PAM is therefore guided by a transdisciplinary approach. Topics of research include drama texts, theatre performances, music theatre, dance theatre, opera, ballet, as well as popular theatre forms, such as variety theatre and music hall, or broader cultural manifestations like fireworks, public ceremonies, royal entries, etc. The transdisciplinary research conducted at S:PAM also includes modern and new media. The term 'media art' is generally used to refer to those artistic practices that use the new technologies that were developed from the nineteenth century onwards. The invention of photography and film heralded the age of mechanical reproducibility (Benjamin) and questioned then-current criteria of art. Modern media art includes photography and film, whereas new media art employs more recently developed technologies and includes video art and audiovisual installations, CCTV-art, sound art, net art, artistic computer game modification, electronic art, etc. S:PAM not only focuses on the impact of modern and new media on diverse art forms (visual arts, film, performing arts and music), but also takes on the challenge to investigate the intermedial and trans-artistic consequences of these encounters. Of specific interest in this context are the ways in which different media do or do not transform one another.

S:PAM's research practice is clustered around five main focuses: Technologies; Memories, Traumata & Conflicts; Histories; Dramaturgies and Practices.